THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

DD/ST# *5-116 - 65 -*

November 1, 1965

Vice Adm. William F. Raborn, Jr., USN Ret.
Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C.   20505

Dear Admiral Raborn:

Subject: American Standard Code for Information Interchange
           . (ASCII)

By a joint memorandum, copy attached, we are requesting the
views of vendors on the economic impact of the attached policy
statement which proposes the adoption of the American Standard
Code for Information Interchange as a Federal Standard.

In addition to the views of the vendors, we need to have an
expression of the views of using Departments of the Federal
Government. Your cooperation in providing an expression of
your Department views, not later than November 19, 1965, will
be appreciated. If further information is needed, inquiries
may be directed to Mr. L. L. Griffin, Office for the
Coordination and Development of ADP Standards, (Code 154
ext. 7742) Center for Computer Sciences and Technology,
National Bureau of Standards, or Mr. Marvin Burris, Data
Processing Coordination Staff, (Code 183 ext. 5863) General
Services Administration.

Secretary of Commerce

Services

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THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
WASHINGTON, D.C.   20230

November 1, 1965

Subject: American Standard Code for Information Interchange
· ˙ (ASCII)

The Bureau of the Budget has asked the Department of Commerce
and the General Services Administration for a recommendation
on whether the American Standard Code for Information Inter-
change should be adopted as a Federal Standard.

Before we make such a recommendation we would like to know
the economic impact of such action upon suppliers of computers
and information processing equipment including communications
and the earliest feasible time at which each supplier could
provide the Federal Government with equipment responsive to
the proposed standard. The desirability of maximum feasible
compatibility among Federal agencies in the input-output
characteristics of the equipment which they use for automatic
data processing was emphasized in the Bureau of the Budget's
Report to the President on the Management of Automatic Data
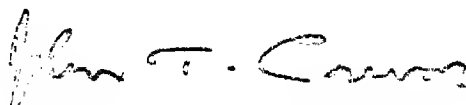Processing in the Federal Government.

As you know, President Johnson approved this report and forwarded
it to Congress on March 2, 1965. It is presently available in
Senate Document 15, printed at the request of the Senate
Committee on Government Operations, and we presume that copies ·
of this document have been studied by members of your company.

As the Bureau of the Budget has said, "The attainment of
greater compatibility among ADP systems is an essential element
of the Government's program to achieve more effective and
economical use of this equipment, and requires a coordinated
and unified effort among all who have primary responsibilities
in this regard."

Accordingly we will appreciate it if you will provide, no later than November 10, 1965, a written response to the undersigned commenting upon the economic impact of the attached proposed policy statement which has been recommended by the Standards Panel of the Bureau of the Budget's ADP Advisory Council. Your reply should also indicate the earliest date at which your firm can supply equipment responsive to the proposed policy (making ASCII a Federal Standard).

If further information is needed, inquiries may be directed to Mr. L. L. Griffin, Office for the Coordination and Development of ADP Standards, (Area Code 202, EM-2-4040 x 7742) Center for Computer Sciences and Technology, National Bureau of Standards, or Mr. Marvin Burris, Data Processing Coordination Staff, (Area Code 202, 343-5863) General Services Administration.

Secretary of Commerce

Acting Administrator of General Services

Enclosure

Proposal of the Standards Panel

The Standards Panel of the ADP Advisory Council, at its meeting on
January 25, 1965, agreed to the following statement in connection
with the adoption of the American Standard Code for Information
Interchange (ASCII) by the Federal Government and recommends that
the statement be issued as a policy requirement.

1. Objective. The objective of the Federal Government is to
achieve, through the adoption and implementation of appropriate
information processing system standards, the highest practical degree
of compatibility for the interchange of information in machine-
processable form within and between information processing systems,
including input-output equipment, source data automation equipment,
other associated equipment and communication systems. Included in
this objective is the maximum use of standard programming languages
and a minimum need for reprocessing, reordering or conversion of
information in interchange operations. This objective is not limited
to interchange within the Federal Government but is to be extended,
wherever practical, to interchange with other Governmental bodies,
Government contractors and the public at large.

2. Policy. In support of this objective, it is the policy of
the Federal Government to acquire and use systems and equipment which
utilize the ASCII and the associated principal media standards (i.e.,
magnetic tape, punched tape and cards) for character input-output and
transmission operations. Future planning for the development and pro-
curement of general purpose electronic digital computer systems and
associated hardware, including communication systems and source data
automation equipment, should therefore be based on the use of the ASCII.

The following magnetic tape input-output practices will be considered
consistent with the above policy:

a. Packing two numeric digits with a common parity bit in a
single character frame for high performance magnetic tape file
maintenance and similar local operations, provided non-numeric
information is recorded in the prescribed ASCII mode.

b. The recording of information in binary word form when used
in association with a binary mode of computer operation.

3. Implementation. In order to provide for the earliest practical
implementation of this policy, the General Services Administration should
include provision for the use of the ASCII in input-output operations as
a specification in the FY 1967 Federal Supply Schedule term contracts for
ADP equipment.

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Prior to FY 1967, the cost of converting to and from ASCII for information interchange operations shall be taken into consideration by all Federal agencies in considering the selection of systems and equipment which do not utilize the ASCII and associated media standards for input-output purposes. The cost of converting to and from ASCII will be the responsibility of the organization obtaining the equipment utilizing a non-standard code.

4. Exceptions. In unusual cases where departments and agencies find it necessary to deviate from the stated policy, the Director of the National Bureau of Standards will be notified in writing as soon as the need for deviation becomes evident. Such notification should include a complete statement of the reasons why a deviation is being authorized, so that the problems being encountered can be resolved or given appropriate consideration in the future development or revision of information processing standards. A copy of the notification will be sent to the Director, Bureau of the Budget.

Approved For Release 2002/02/06 : CIA-RDP83T00573R000500170031-8